



THE INQUIRER

£1 | Issue 7963 | 17 May 19

The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians

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Ending period poverty

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THE INQUIRER

The Unitarian and Free Christian Paper

Established in 1842, The Inquirer is the oldest nonconformist religious newspaper.

“To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition.”

From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001

The Inquirer is published fortnightly by The Inquirer Publishing Company (2004), Registered Charity 1101039.

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Articles express the views of their writers. Submissions are welcome and may be edited for content and length. They should be emailed or typed and should be the writer's original work or be attributed appropriately.

Annual subscriptions are £38 with discounts for bulk orders. Cheques payable to 'The Inquirer'.

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Advertise for £6 per column cm, on 3-col page, plus VAT or £7.50 per col cm, on a 2-col page. A one-page supplement is £200. One column on a 2-col page is £100, on a 3-col page, £75. A5 fliers may be inserted for £95 plus VAT. Contact the editor for details.

Births, marriages and deaths: 50p a word + VAT.

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Inquiring Words...

May your life preach more loudly than your lips.

William Ellery Channing

Editor's view

Welcome to this all-colour *Inquirer*, featuring coverage from the 2019 Annual Meetings of the Unitarian General Assembly. The meetings were a bit more frenetic as the shorter timetable necessitated squeezing a lot in. But there was a good atmosphere and a lot got done.

If you take a look at the group photo on page 8, you may notice one of the biggest smiles in the bunch in the centre-left third row. Derek McAuley was just a week short of retirement when the picture was taken and he is clearly enjoying himself. He leaves our movement so much better than how he found it. And, he will be missed. Derek's professionalism, discretion and care have been central to the growth of the movement's leaders. His leadership, and willingness to act as a spokesperson for the causes that are important to Unitarians, have helped promote social change and, perhaps, brought our faith to the attention of people who needed to find us.

I believe that Derek's tenure put the movement into a position where we could attract someone of Elizabeth Slade's calibre. I'm sure we all look forward to where she will lead us.

The Inquirer's redesign

We had a marvellous slot at the meetings with an excellent turnout. Many present said they liked the new design of the paper. And, several people let us know that the font in the first new-style issue was difficult to read. The designers took a look at it and have bumped up the size and darkened the typeface. If you have difficulty reading it this week, please do let me know.

More letters

Several attenders at The Inquirer's slot said they would like to see more letters to the editor published in the paper. I would too! I know with so many of us connected by email, it's tempting to write directly to someone who's had an article published and to continue the discussion that way. But please think about still sending a letter in, so we can all participate. I've always said that the letters page is one of the best read in the paper. But it won't be if no one sends a letter. I am always happy to receive them (preferably via email).

– MC Burns

Clarification: The 6 April edition of *The Inquirer* featured an article sponsored by the new Unitarian College. In it, the Unitarian College Manchester Past and Present Students' Union was thanked for a generous contribution to the new Unitarian College.

The £400 donation was meant for the Unitarian Ministerial Students' Fund – one which provides funds for ministerial students' personal financial support. That allocation has now been made.

With thanks: This all-colour issue of *The Inquirer*, featuring coverage of the annual meetings, is sponsored by the Unitarian General Assembly.

Taking up the presidency of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, **Celia Cartwright** pledges to be 'enough'

I am here to say thank you

Sue Woolley seconded the nomination to appoint Celia Cartwright, giving her biographical details. Celia was born in the fifties to Edith and Ernest Cartwright. Two brothers followed, Andrew and Philip. It was something of a nomadic childhood. Thankfully, everywhere they went there was a local Unitarian church. Celia joined Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps. She met her husband and became mother to her beloved children Sean and Karen. Her beloved brother, Philip was killed in a car accident. Unitarian support was there, and the family came under the care of Rev Pat Womersley, at Torquay Unitarian Church. In time, she was leading worship. In 1993, she became a Lay Leader. She took up ministry training at Unitarian College Manchester, graduating in 1997. A six-month interim ministry with Padiham, was followed by her appointment to Rochdale in 1998. In 2006, she was called to Kendal, where she remained until her retirement in 2016.

On accepting the office, Celia spoke: There is something both daunting and humbling about being asked if one would agree to being nominated as President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. So much passed through my mind, mostly panic, I have always said it's the one thing I didn't want to do. And when I was first asked if I would accept being nominated, I said no! – and when asked why, I replied: No, because I have two old dogs to care for.

No, I'm not really the extrovert I think people think I am, I'm actually mostly reclusive. No, I live alone, by choice, but that means I have no partner to support me, find tickets with me, book stuff with me, calm me down when I get stressed with having to be in Manchester, Northern Ireland and Torquay, all within three weeks (which I will in June).

No, I have a short-list of autoimmune diseases that rob me of energy and one of which, actually makes eating away from home a game of Russian roulette.

Fear of not being good enough

All those excuses tripped off my tongue, but what I realised was that, there lies within me a quiet fear, known to so many of us, and its dogged me all of my life, it's not an uncommon fear – the fear that I, me, this short, 68 year old woman is not good enough. I even wrote a poem, it came to me while meditating at my regular attendance at my local Quaker 'Experimenting

'Throughout my nomadic childhood there was a Unitarian church close by to welcome our family into a warm and loving community.'

with Light Meditation' group earlier this month, which appears on page 4 – 'enough'. I have shared the poem with a few other people, and it seems these fears are truly universal.

So, getting back to the story, I said 'NOOOOOO!'

But my protestations were not immediately accepted and I was asked to think about it for a week, during which I talked the idea over with friends and family. And at some point, around about day five or six, my daughter said it sounded to her as if I was just creating a list of reasons why not when, in truth, she thought, I did want to do it.

I began to think about my life in this

Movement.

From the age of four, in Sunday School at Mottram, this Unitarian movement has been my rock and often my salvation. Throughout my nomadic childhood there was a Unitarian church close by to welcome our family into a warm and loving community.

Welcomed with open arms

And when I left it to go wandering for years, it didn't complain, it didn't turn its back on me, didn't tell me I no longer belonged. And when I crept back, drowning in deep grief and distress, I was welcomed with open arms and a gentle, loving heart. It held me. And it helped to heal my brokenness. And when I decided I needed to know more about this wonderful faith family, I was instantly encouraged and helped and I set off on a journey

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Shown above: The Rev Celia Cartwright speaks. Photo by Steve Fisher

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to discover what we were all about. It was the first step on a journey I didn't know I needed to take, a journey that has led me here.

It uncovered a passion for this liberal and welcoming faith that has not waned and never will. It uncovered skills I never knew I had. It uncovered a voice that had never been heard, that I didn't know I had. It gave me a life I could not have dreamed. In the end, clearly, I said yes. Not because I think I'm good enough or fancy wearing a big gong round my neck. I said yes because I stopped and acknowledged something; that this Unitarian and Free Christian Movement, this faith, this sometimes rag-tag and argumentative assembly, is such a precious and wonderful thing. I cannot speak for others, but I know that it has been the one constant in my entire life; the one thing I could always rely on to be there, wherever I was, whenever I needed it to be, even when I had been away for a long time and came back with so much of the foundation for a faith I had once been so secure in disintegrating. It was there to hold me and heal me and allow me to re-find my faith, albeit along a slightly different path.

So in the end I said yes to this honour, not because I think I'm anything special or have some right to it, but because, quite simply, I want to say thank you.

I am here now because you were there then and now. You, my precious and wonderful Unitarian and Free Christian movement, church, chapel, meeting, fellowship – yes, all of these which at their best, created an incredible community, beloved, blessed, community, nurturing, shaping, blessing, holding, healing one another. I have been given this opportunity to give something back to this movement. I am looking forward to the coming months. To meeting as many members of this Assembly as I can, and sharing my passion for exploring the myriad experiences of the divine and in using those experiences to live a way of life that is not at odds with the principles of our faith. I look forward to encouraging all I meet to look further than our individual congregations, further than our own personal doctrines, further than the state of our finances or our buildings, and become, fully, joyously, part of this community, this Assembly of Unitarians and Free Christians, revelling in all our wonderful colours, across such a wide and wonderful spectrum of rich and varied diversity.

Thank you for all those that have been, and those that will be. I shall seek to serve you to the best of my abilities and energies in this year, proud to bear the title of president of our wonderful assembly and to serve you to the best of my abilities and strength.

enough

I hesitate to place the pencil down
Or rather, having picked it up, to write,
To set in words
What is not formed
To capture fleeting fears and doubts
That swirl and dance like insects
Over a stagnant lake.

The days and hours rush on, and on and
All too soon are gone
And I,
Caught up in the swirling eddy of this
Maelstrom
Just hang on.

For oh so long I've lived by skin of teeth
And
Hung right on by fingertips.
If I do seem serene then
What a show
To hide the madly paddling feet
Beneath the waters of my life.

The day is coming, coming, coming soon
When I must
With heart and soul
Commit to be
A flag all hoist

And I must don that garment
That the others see, not really me
Or if it is, then it is
Some bright facet
Gilded well to shine
And hide the dread and insecurity
In fallen shadows
That hide behind the glitter

And I will shine,
And give my heart and soul
And be all and all that I can be
And hope that all I can
Will be enough
And I will be enough
I will be,
Enough.

1 April 2019
Celia Cartwright

Joan Cook completes her presidential year grateful and hopeful.

We are not doomed



Shown above: Joan Cook addresses the assembly. Photo by Steve Fisher

I have thoroughly enjoyed my year in the role of president of the General Assembly, representing Unitarians at various events across the country, as well as abroad. I have met so many people, have shared experiences, meals, time, services of worship, with you, and have experienced such generous hospitality, as I have carried out my duties as your President. I have been fortunate to have the support of my family in this past year, and I am grateful to Celia Cartwright, Cliff Reed and John Clifford, who all stood in for me when I was unable to attend an event.

But I have also benefitted greatly from the support I have received from Essex Hall, especially from Mary-Jean Hennis, Andrew Mason, and of course Derek, my 'Unitarian husband'! I am also grateful to all those congregations who offered me the freedom of their pulpits, a concept at the core of our Unitarian ethos, but not understood by those from outwith our denomination. (I hope I didn't let you down!) Being able to meet with Unitarians who never attend the annual meetings, or get involved in events at national level, has been a great pleasure for me, as I have toured the country, and a bit of a surprise as I have discovered how much of a boost to a small out-of-the-way congregation, a visit from the President can be. As I have travelled round the country, I have seen the richness of our denomination, the diversity of congregations, congregations which are thriving in spirit, if not in number, and congregations which express their take on Unitarian worship in such differing ways. It is seeing this energy, this vitality that gives me hope for our denomination. Yes, we need more money, more people, more involvement, and definitely need to address the issue of over 60% of our membership declining to exercise their vote. But what I have seen, has, on the whole, given me hope for Unitarianism in the future.

People keep our churches going

We hear so much about how we are doomed, we will be gone in the next seven years, but what I have seen, I think, disproves the doomsayers. As I have attended events, representing Unitarians, I have met some quite important people, I have met so many interesting people, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Prince Charles on a couple of occasions. The Bishops of Hull, Lichfield, Kolosvar; heads of other faith groups, the Coptic Churches, Baptist, Jewish, Sikh, Spiritualist and Humanist groups; the President of the American Unitarian Universalist Association, (who I was pleased to welcome to St Mark's), Moderator of the Church of Scotland, and Primus of the Episcopal Church.

I have met several politicians, and political leaders, including Vince Cable of the Liberal Party; Jeremy Hunt, the Foreign Secretary; Iain Blackford, leader of the SNP at Westminster, and Gordon Brown.

But I have also met some *really* important people, the people who keep our congregations going, who enable our churches and chapels to open on Sundays, as well as other days, offering services of worship, places of welcome, of calmness, respite, reflection and sanctuary, and we are so grateful for their dedication.

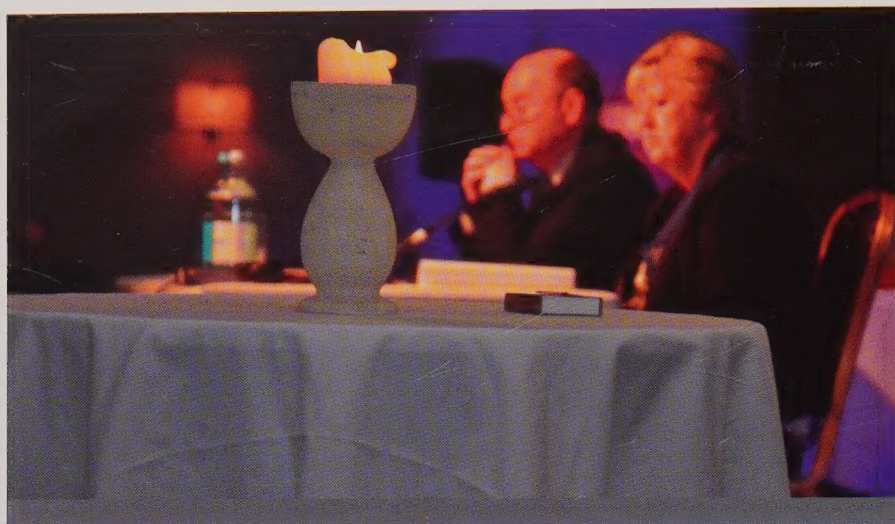
They keep Unitarianism alive

The people who every Sunday can be found welcoming people at the door with a smile and a hymnbook, making the coffee, leading worship, children's activities or poetry groups. Those who balance the books, see to upkeep and maintenance of our buildings, we need and thank them all. These are the people who keep our churches and chapels alive. We thank you all. There are many projects about which we hear a great deal, but there are also many activities going on far from the centre, about which we hear nothing. There are congregations who may be small in number, relying on the same people as they have been for many years, but still;

- They are exploring new and innovative ways of working with their local communities, and like-minded organisations;
- They are delivering a variety of forms of worship; demonstrating their Unitarianism as they represent us on external bodies, work alongside other faith, and secular groups, towards mutual goals.
- They are keeping Unitarianism alive, moving forward, becoming more relevant to people today, and their communities.

An important aspect of the role of president is representing British Unitarians at home, and abroad, and it has been a great pleasure to represent our denomination at Inter-Faith services and events, such as the inauguration of a Memorial to Victims of

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Our belief in the value of the individual human being at the very core of our religious philosophy finds its expression in all we do.

Shown left: Derek McAuley and Joan Cook. Photo by Steve Fisher

Unity of a common heart

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Terrorism Overseas, in Lichfield, and the opening of a House of Religious Freedom, in Kolosvar, Romania.

It is by working with other secular, as well as faith-based, groups that we demonstrate our respect for those whose beliefs and attitudes differ from our own, and our commitment to celebrating life in its many forms.

But perhaps what some may see as the most important event, certainly the one with the highest profile, the national act of remembrance at the Cenotaph in November, was indeed an important event.

We value the individual

Personally I find the militarism of the event difficult, but knowing how much it meant to people, and being able to represent those of our members, for whom it is incredibly important, was a privilege, albeit quite daunting. What I did find incredibly moving though, was the service of remembrance at Westminster Abbey which I, alongside other faith leaders and representatives, attended on the evening of the 11 November.

Seeing young people lay their wreaths on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, alongside that of the Queen and the President of German Republic; hearing a young corporal, a schoolgirl, and a young man speak, as well as the President of German Republic speaking, in German, with the translation of his words in our orders of service, was so moving. This service really brought home to everyone there, and to me, just what this annual act of remembrance is all about.

I have learned so much about the workings of our denomination, and the variations of Unitarianism throughout the country. I have met, and worked with so many good people, people who have the well-being and growth of our denomination at heart. And I have now experienced Unitarian worship in English, French, Tamil, Hungarian and Welsh. And I have had the privilege of knowing that I have been able to make my

contribution to the working of Unitarianism in the UK.

Just as every single, individual, one of us is part of the interdependent web of existence, then every single one of us is part of our General Assembly, and if the web of existence of which we are part is inter-dependent, then so too is our General Assembly.

Unitarians are often thought to be an individualistic bunch. Well, I suppose we need to be honest and accept that – we are! Well, that can in itself be a strength. It is in fact our belief in the value of the individual human being that is at the very core of our religious philosophy, and finds its expression in all we do. We do need to accept however that there are limitations in what we can do as individuals, and it is by coming together that we can accomplish even more.

The 19th-century Unitarian, Ralph Waldo Emerson is often labelled as an individualist, but in his essay *The Over-Soul* Emerson describes what he calls 'the common heart', he wrote, 'This unity of thought, in which every heart beats.'

I have been proud to serve as your president, and I am grateful to have had such a terrific opportunity, I wish Celia Cartwright finds as much pleasure in the role as I have, and I thank you all.



Joan Cook

Joan Cook is former president of the Unitarian General Assembly and former member of the Executive Committee of the GA. She is a member of St Mark's Unitarian Church, Edinburgh.

Robert Ince, one of the four convenors who worked with Chief Officer Derek McAuley looks back on his tenure.

A steady presence



Shown above: Executive Committee convenors applaud Derek McAuley (seated). Photo by John Hewerdine

When Derek McAuley became Chief Officer in November 2009, it was Cross St Chapel's loss and the General Assembly's gain. The Manchester chapel hoped Derek would be their treasurer for many years, and he'd now moved on far too quickly. When he took the post, Derek knew what he was letting himself in for. He had been co-opted onto the Executive Committee in May 2008 and became its Honorary Treasurer in April 2009.

Derek set about creating a sense of stability and control at a time of major upheaval in the GA's organisational structure. The Council had gone; the Commissions and Panels were to be disbanded in favour of Strategy Groups; the Executive Committee was still finding its way through all the changes and coming to terms with fewer financial resources – the one constant through all this needed to be Derek.

At the beginning Derek was still living in Manchester at weekends and it was some time before he moved completely to London, but he was always there and his commitment was and always has been 100%.

Members of the EC past and present will tell you that Derek has always been the good and faithful servant to the EC, clear that his role was to offer advice but never to interfere with the decision making, although there have been times, no doubt, when he resisted the temptation to say, 'I told you so!'

As the makeup of the EC changes, which happens every two years, there is a challenge for the Convenor to mould new members into a team. I can say, from personal experience, that Derek's wise counsel has been a huge help in keeping things running smoothly.

The real hallmark of Derek's success as chief officer has been good governance. He has ensured that we do things correctly in terms of Charity Law, that our financial accounting is beyond reproach and that we treat the staff at Essex Hall with fairness and consideration. If all this sounds easy and obvious, then I can assure you it isn't that straightforward. It takes a lot of work and skill to make it look that easy.

Derek has managed to build up strong relationships with other faith leaders, particularly with Paul Parker of the Quakers and Rabbi Danny Rich of the Liberal Jews, with whom he forged an alliance that eventually succeeded in changing the Law on Equal Marriage. No one should doubt that it was Derek's contribution to this cause that really did make the difference.

When he appeared before the Commons Select Committee to argue the case for equal marriage, he was quite aggressively attacked by some politicians with conservative views. But throughout it all he remained calm and repeated that the point was simply that two people be allowed to love each other. It was,

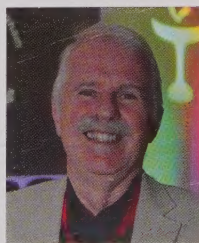
he said later, one of the most frightening experiences he'd ever had.

Derek had become the champion of the LGBTQ+ community. It is to Derek's credit that half of the Churches registered today for same sex marriage are Unitarian.

When I took over as Convenor, we were coming to the end of a five-year plan that had been less than an outstanding success and we found ourselves needing to come up with something that would inspire and be achievable. And so the vision process evolved. It was Derek's commitment to the process and his energy to make things happen and to facilitate the various meetings that resulted in 'The Next Steps' plan. I can't thank him enough for both his help and his enthusiasm.

In recent times, the creation of new Unitarian College has been a cornerstone of our new approach to training. It would not have been possible without Derek's wise counsel, knowledge and depth of understanding about the formation of new charities and CIOs. That it should have such universal support today stands as testament to Derek's contribution to the future of Unitarianism. As a person, Derek is a man of complete integrity; we know there will be no corners cut, nothing left undone, and complete honesty when things don't work out as planned. For me, Derek is a person who I know I can rely on completely and he will always be a true champion for the Unitarian cause.

I have no doubt that Unitarians everywhere are sad that Derek is leaving. We wish him well in his retirement and look forward to working with his successor Chief Officer, Liz Slade.



Robert Ince

Robert Ince was elected to the Unitarian General Assembly Executive Committee in April. He previously served from 2014-17 as the EC convenor. He is a member of Fulwood Old Chapel, Sheffield.

General Assembly 201

'This Unitarian and Free Christian Movement, this faith, this sometimes



and argumentative assembly, is such a precious and wonderful thing.'
– GA President Celia Cartwright



No regrets?

Hope for the future and past

It's what we do with our regrets that makes the difference.

One of the most popular songs played at funerals is 'My Way' by Frank Sinatra and that famous line, 'Regrets I've had a few, but then again too few to mention.' Is this really true though? Can any of us truly say that as our lives end that we have few regrets? I'm not sure I can. I cannot make the claim that I have no regrets about my life.

Like many young boys I had a fascination with heroic adventurers growing up. One of the classics was Antarctic explorer Captain Robert Falcon Scott (an adventurer if ever there was one). Towards the end of March 1912 Scott and his two surviving companions sat freezing to death in their shelter, food and fuel running out and with no hope of rescue. A team of five had set out in the hope of being the first people to set foot on the South Pole. Sadly when they arrived at the pole two months earlier, they discovered that a Norwegian team had beaten them by a month. As they headed back, disappointed, they lost two members of the team. Scott and the other two survivors managed to shelter themselves, but knew that there was no hope for survival. Months later a search party found them and with them Scott's diary. One of the final entries ponders the meaning of the experience he shared with his doomed companions. In it he states, '...I do not regret this journey...' and continues, 'We took risks, we knew we took them; things have come out against us, and therefore we have no cause for complaint, but bow to the will of Providence, determined still to do our best to the last.'

In many ways it is a classic hero's journey, except one in which the hero did not return with treasure to share – unless you take his writings as the hero returning. Perhaps they are. For in so many ways they have become the legend long after Scott's and his team's deaths, particularly those six simple words, 'I do not regret this journey'.

Now I'm no Captain Scott, I'm no adventurer and I do live with regret. That said, like Scott I do not regret the journey that has been my life. There have been many failures and mistakes along the way but looking back I do not regret the journey itself. Would I like to repeat it though? Gosh no. Do I want to shut the door on it? No, not at all. I, like the great poet Robert Frost, live with not only hope for the future, but also the past; for the more faithfully I live, the less guilt and shame I feel about the past. I keep on coming again and again despite falling short of my ideals, despite breaking my vows once again (to quote Rumi). I know I'm in good company. Yes, I live with regret, 'live' being the operative word. In many ways it is my regret that points me to try to live a better way and to create a legacy for others. I have faith in the capacity to make good from what has gone wrong before. I move forward in hope – both for the future and the past.

FROM NOTHING TO EVERYTHING

By Danny Crosby



Regret is an interesting word. It is a lament, from the Old French word 'regreter', meaning 'one who bewails the dead', which comes from a Germanic root meaning 'to greet'. As Mark Nepo has said of regret 'We always face these two phases of regret: to bewail what is dead and gone, and, if we can move through that grief, to greet the chance to do things differently as we move on.'

As we move on with not only hope for the future, but also hope for the past, the key is to truly 'live' with regret, to make something better from it. Nepo notes something of real value here; it is a lesson from grief. Yes regret is a lament for what has gone, what has died, but if we greet it fully with love we can learn from the past and do things differently. The response to regret is both of life and death. The choice is ours. By the way, this is the one choice we have in life. We do not choose what happens to us but we can choose how we respond to what happens to us. This is the one ultimate freedom, open to all. As Viktor Frankl so beautifully put it. 'Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.'

It's not regret alone that is the issue, but what we do with our regrets. Yes, regrets can eat away at our souls, but if we are wise, regrets can be powerful teachers too. To learn from them we just need enough humility and hope for both the future and the past, rather than allow them to gnaw away at our souls. Hope is the key. It is hope that will allow us to learn from our regrets and thus create a better future.

I do not regret the journey. I live with hope both for the future and the past. I face my regret, knowing I have broken my vows many times and no doubt will do so again. That said, this does not paralyse me. I do not spend my days lamenting, neither do I close the door on the past. I simply live through the grief of regret and greet the future and the past with its possibility of what might yet be.

The Rev Danny Crosby is minister with Urmston and Altrincham congregations.

Song of Hope

While offering devotions at the start of a GA plenary session, Ministry Student **Stephanie Bisby** introduced the delegates to words she wrote for the melody of 'Finlandia'.

Tune: Finlandia, Hymns For Living, no 226

This is my song, spirit of soil and starlight,
a song of hope, for all the days to come.
This is my dream: a world where kindness prospers;
Where storms soon pass; clouds part to show the sun;
Where rainbows crown the view, a gleaming promise
That life's made fresh; a new world has begun.

In hills and valleys, rivers tumble by us
Reminding us that time flows ever on.
On sandy beaches, tides wash out our footsteps,
As hearts forgive, and past hurts will be gone.
O hear my song, spirit of soil and starlight
A song of hope for all the days to come.



Photo by Steve Fisher

Originally published in the *Stirrings* anthology, with this year's theme of 'Prophetic Visions: Unitarian Style'. *Stirrings* is a collection of writings issued each year by the Past and Present Students Union of Unitarian College Manchester. The 2019 volume is available from Stephanie Bisby for £5 plus £1.50 p&p. Send a cheque made out to PPSU to 71 Earlesmere Avenue, Balby, Doncaster, DN4 0QD or email: stephaniebisby@gmail.com

Remembering our Earth Spirits

By **Tony McNeile**

The Earth Spirit Network had its meeting on the first afternoon of the annual meetings and was led this year by the Bolton group. They have produced a set of 'Wheel of the Year' cards. There is a picture on each card and a description of the eight festivals that mark the changes in the natural progress of the year. It begins with Yule, the midwinter solstice, moves to Imbolc (1 February) when the ground has warmed enough for seeds to germinate, then to the equinox and the beginning of spring. May Eve (card shown right) is a celebration of fertility and leads to the summer solstice. Lammastide in August is the first of the harvests and leads to the autumn equinox and the slowing down of growth. Samhain on 31 October heralds the beginning of winter and is a time to reflect on the year gone by and especially to remember those whose lives came to an end during the year. Finally it is time to prepare for celebrations to overcome the cold short days of winter - and the cycle starts again. At our meeting we split into small groups and with the cards reflected on how our own lives respond to the changing year. Feedback afterwards focused on how easily the often frenetic and continuous pace of human life can lose touch with the changing seasons of the year. Emotionally and spiritually we also have our seasons. There are growing times, decaying times and times of quiet stillness. The wheel of the year can connect us to this cycle of life. Life is about times of light and times of darkness - and we need not treat the dark times as failure. Ian Trotman painted the attractive pictures on the cards.

The stall not only displayed the cards and advertised our meeting. We also sold copies of this year's journal, 'The File'.



In the run up to the annual meeting someone had asked on social media if there was to be any recognition of the fortnight of awareness of the damage being done to the earth by human activity and our contribution to climate change. The Earth Spirit Network raised awareness of this by firstly asking people to look at the work of the United Nations Environment Programme and support its work.

We also asked people to 'Sign the Pledge', to make a pledge of what they were going to do, personally, to protect the environment and reduce damage to it. Pledges included, reducing the use of plastic, buying locally produced food, using public transport more, looking at unnecessary lighting in the home as well as other utility usage.

Making a difference personally must still coincide with supporting pressure groups that seek to influence governmental and commercial bodies to change attitudes and practices. It also emphasises the point that many people doing a little can have a significant effect.

The Rev Tony McNeile is a retired minister and a founder of the Unitarian Earth Spirit Network. For more information on the Network see: <https://bit.ly/2V6Gnf9>

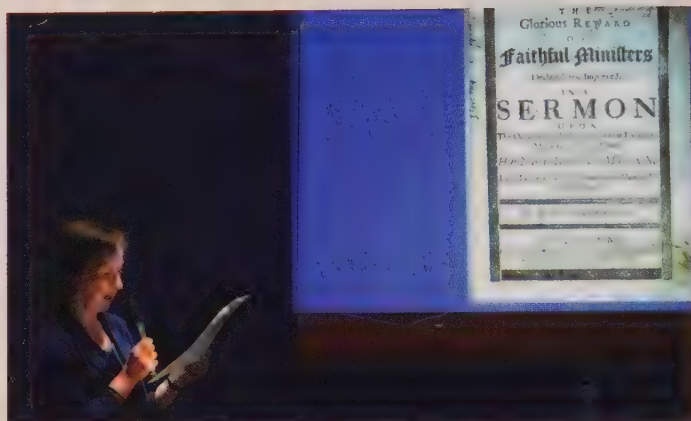
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Book benefactors aided dissenters

By Alan Ruston

For the first time at GA meetings, it was necessary to squeeze in our AGM, our speaker's address and questions afterwards, all in an hour. Despite forebodings, it all worked very well, which was due in large measure to our speaker Rachel Eckersley keeping exactly to time. Our President, Daniel Costley took us quickly through the AGM which revealed a successful year. Our treasurer Rob Wightman had pruned some of our costs and with some new members our finances were healthy. David Steers, our editor, introduced the 2019 Transactions, recently despatched, which was wide-ranging as usual. It is likely that in 2020 the Society will publish two issues of the Transactions as there are numerous good and interesting articles on hand.

Our speaker Dr Eckersley, the daughter of our previous treasurer, is visiting research fellow at the Queen Mary University of London Centre for Religion and Literature. She spoke on the benefactions of books to the Northern dissenting academies in the 18th and 19th centuries. The concept of benefaction was a key factor in the development of English dissenting academies and their libraries. Subscribers wished to support the growing and lively local dissenting communities, particularly in the populous regions of the North of England, by training increasing numbers of students to become ministers. The dissenting academies covered were centred in Lancashire, mainly in Manchester, and in the West Riding of Yorkshire, latterly at Bradford. They were mainly set up to train ministers for Congregationalist or Independent churches, though of course Warrington Academy for radical dissenters comes within this location. They tried to meet a need as dissent – and in particular Congregationalism – was expending rapidly in the whole area. In 1840 the Congregational Magazine estimated that 2,000 educated ministers were needed to sustain the churches in England and Wales and overseas. Benefactors supplied books, sometimes on being asked to meet the cost but on other occasions lengthy lists of titles were sent to likely donors to make up known deficiencies. The academies themselves were often too cash-strapped to provide even barely adequate libraries from their own funds.



Shown above: Dr Rachel Eckersley addressed the Unitarian Historical Society. Photo by John Hewerdine

It has to be admitted that for many, one of the main reasons for adding new books was to lighten 'the cloud of Socinian darkness.' The use of the word Socinian rather than Unitarian at this time was often used by orthodox dissenters, in the words of a 19th-century commentator, because it sounded very like 'so sinful.' One of main donors was George Hadfield (1787-1879), a solicitor and MP. A well-known figure, he attacked Unitarians for controlling old dissenting chapels which he thought was dishonest on their part. He was a long-term supporter of Congregational causes. For example, with Thomas Raffles and William Roby, he established the Lancashire Independent College, first at Blackburn and then at Whalley Bridge to which he gave £2000 towards the cost of erection and the creation of its library.

A lively and different address which was followed, within the time allowed, by questions and comments on the actual location in Lancashire and Yorkshire of the various colleges that were discussed.

Alan Ruston is a Unitarian historian, member of the Historical Society and a member of the Watford Fellowship.

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PERIODS

Poverty, secrecy cause shame

The Unitarian Women's Group looked at the economic and environmental costs of having periods.

By Margaret Robinson

At the start of the well-attended UWG workshop on Period Poverty, led by Catherine Lennox, we were asked to write one word on 'What we thought when we heard the word Period'. Most words were negative – painful, restrictive, nuisance, but some were positive – creativity, new life, growing-up. Mandu Reid, Founder of the Cup Effect said, 'It is the year of menstrual momentum. We are talking more openly about periods now than ever before.'

That's not the experience of participants or the statistics. 73% of boys were given no period education. This surprised the audience (including the men present). 64% of girls missed PE or sports because of embarrassment, leaving them 145 days behind their male peers. The average lifetime cost for towels, tampons, painkillers, time off is £10,000. This is the reason why 137,700 girls missed school in the last year, because they could not afford menstrual products. Lucy Russell of Plan International said, 'Period poverty is a very real challenge, and it's devastating to hear the impact it is having on girls' lives, their ability to be themselves, and their self-esteem.' What would society be like if we thought about menstruation positively? We probably wouldn't be talking about it in whispered terms and we wouldn't have bullying and shaming in school and the workplace. In 21st-century Britain, this shouldn't be the case.

What is being done: Betty.me is developing on-line and in-school resources aimed at educating 8-12 year olds about periods. Bloodygoodperiods.com is supplying 25 asylum seeker drop-in centres in London and Leeds with menstrual products. The Red Box Project aims to provide free menstrual products to young people. Tesco dropped its prices on these products, after the Government declined to remove the VAT. Amika George, founded the #Free Periods campaign, when 17 years old. In 2017 she petitioned the Government to provide free menstrual products to all girls who receive free meals. Leeds Football Club Stadium supplies free products in their toilets. One church held an Open Day for donations of menstrual products and got over £2,000 worth.

What can we do? Donate to your local Red Box Project. Encourage your workplace to have products free in staff toilets (with an honesty box for those able to pay). Lobby your local representative to have products freely available in schools. Raise awareness about reusable menstrual cups and non-toxic, environmentally friendly tampons. Use washable re-useable pads, bought or homemade. Margaret Robinson is secretary of the Unitarian Women's Group and a member of Stockton Unitarians.

Tesco reduced prices after the government declined to remove VAT.

How to write a prayer?

By Chris Carr

Unitarian Association of Lay Ministry (UALM) is a group that meets for a long weekend at Great Hucklow once a year to explore new ideas and also comes together in a spiritual cyberspace throughout the other months to try to support people and share ideas. The UALM title for this year's weekend is 'In Our Own Words.'

We always have a workshop slot at the General Assembly. This year was very well attended with many people who haven't met with us before. It was also held in a vibrant spirit! An interactive presentation was very well led by Sheena McKinnon. We decided to focus on one aspect of worship, that being writing our own prayers. There was lively discussion from the start. What do we mean by prayer? Do they express what we mean? Who are the prayers actually intended for? There was much agreement that in our own words we can tailor prayers to the specific needs of our individual communities or issues in the current sphere. On the flip side, are there certain words people expect?

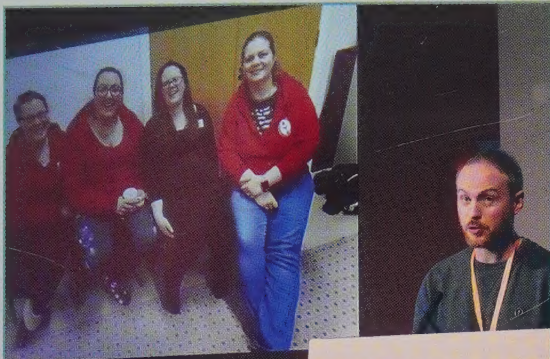
We then went on to discuss types of prayer and their place in

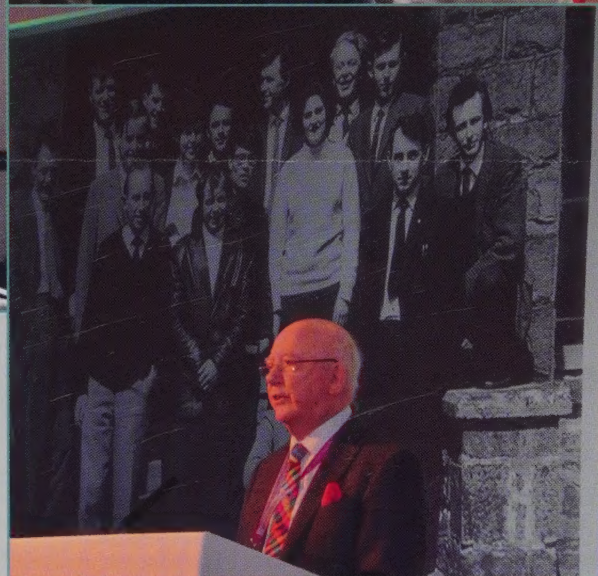
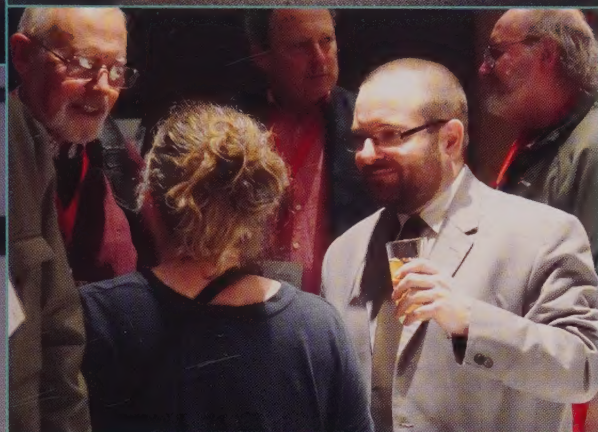
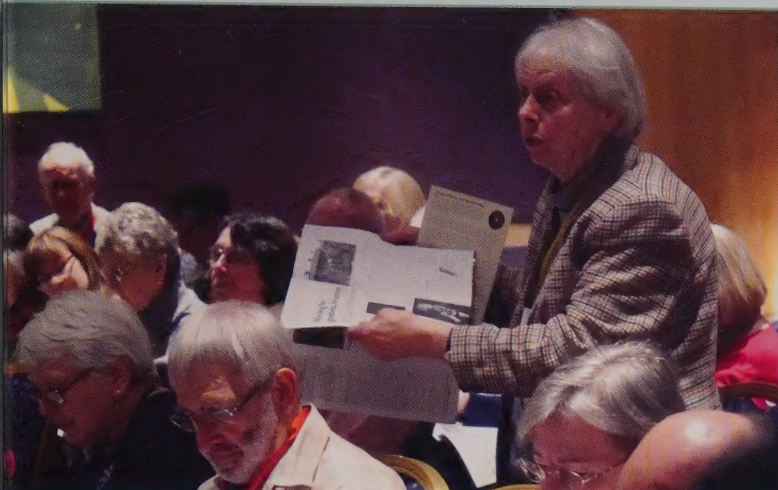
the service. From laments to praises to chalice lightings and many more, it seems rather than being limited as to what we can do, the opportunities are endless. Whilst not forgetting about the new person at the door, we probably know our congregations best and what will work. (Equally there's nothing wrong with shaking people out of their comfort zone from time to time!) The best thing is just to do and try it out. One main point that was raised is that we don't have to start from scratch and shouldn't be frightened to adapt and rewrite prayers, poems and songs that would work in that special moment that many people hold in such importance.

After a very engaging and energetic session the UALM committee feel very positive about the future of the organisation. There was much input from the people at the session and we made sure many people got to give their views. It costs nothing to become a member of UALM, we just need your email address and an agreement you want to be contacted. UALM weekend this year is at Great Hucklow on 22-24 November.

For more information contact Chris Carr, UALM Secretary:

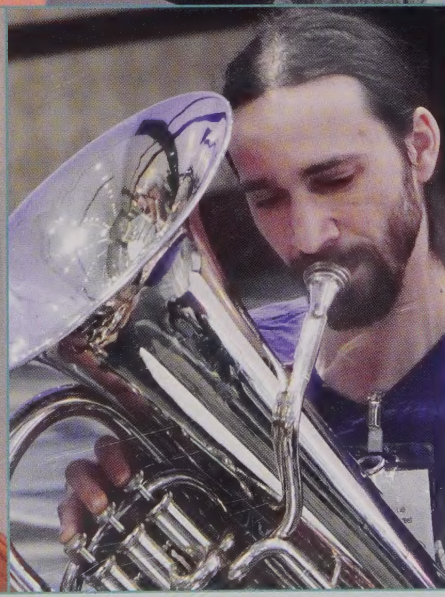
chris.carr.1973@outlook.com





General Assembly 2019

Photos by John Hewerdine and Steve Fisher



WOMEN'S LEAGUE

Over £8000 raised to fight sepsis

By Susan Wildman

The Women's League enjoyed a cup of tea or coffee in the Pavilion Room before their AGM and a talk by Jonathan Roberts of Smile Train UK. Business matters proceeded with speed, enabling all to be completed within the one-hour slot. Anne Gemmell did a sterling job in chairing the whole meeting both as president and past president. There is no president this year but Joyce Ashworth is president elect. Susan Holt presented the accounts, which are in good order. Susan Wildman was given an exotic plant and the honour of becoming an honorary vice president as she is standing down as secretary in June. The post will be taken over by Joan McFarlane.

Anne Gemmell presented a cheque for £8,470 to John McCarthy of the UK Sepsis Trust, the League's project for the past year. It was good to see John on a new mobility scooter. He was delighted with the cheque.

Jonathan Roberts travelled to Birmingham from Essex to give a talk and presentation on Smile Train UK, the project for 2019/20. He told us that 170,000 children are born in the developing world annually with cleft lip and/or cleft palate. £150 can cover the cost of cleft surgery. A child's life can be changed for the better in a 45-minute operation. In this country the NHS carries out the operation in the early weeks after birth, so the general public rarely sees the condition. This is not the case in many parts of the world today where the condition still carries a stigma. When the charity was first set up doctors flew to affected countries and travelled to villages by train, hence the name 'Smile Train'. Today the charity concentrates on training doctors in partnership with hospitals such as Sant Parmanand in Delhi and sponsors speech therapy. Questions and discussion followed the

talk. Several people knew of children born with cleft palate. The Women's League will endeavour to raise a good sum for this, their 2019/20 Project.

The meeting ended with the singing of 'Come Sing a Song with Me' (a cappella) led by the Rev Celia Cartwright who next day became president of the General Assembly for 2019/20. During the singing, League President Anne Gemmell handed round red roses and then closed a much-appreciated meeting.

Susan Wildman is honorary vice president of the Unitarian Women's League.

Shown below: Anne Gemmell presents a cheque to John McCarthy. Photo by Steve Fisher



Peace Fellowship strives to make a difference

By John Philip Carter

We live in a time of unease, uncertainty, and bellicose twitter rants. We have politicians who are only concerned for their funders and followers. Many countries have become more self centred and increasingly narcissistic in their worldview. Political conversations that need to happen do not because these may lead to decisions that would directly harm political careers. Even to the point that many care more about scoring political points and not the hard struggle for peace, justice and equality. Unfortunately this is happening on all sides of the political spectrum. No one is innocent and even I as I write this I recognise my own culpability. The Unitarian Peace Fellowship AGM and session had one of our largest attendances at GA in years. Many came searching for answers and to speak of their concerns.

We reported the committee's decision to highlight GA motions and to help shepherd Unitarian awareness of them.

Sue Woolley will lead the UPF sub group tasked with the Charter for Compassion. Feargus O'Connor will lead the UPF sub group tasked with the Clara Barton Emergency Fund, as well as highlighting other emergency relief organisations.

John Carter will lead the UPF sub group tasked with information/social media/blog work.

One growing concern for the committee is that of Arms Sales by

our government. The UK is in the top six of arms dealers to the world. We hope to develop a study packet for congregations and individuals.

Many of the attendees appreciated what UPF is trying to achieve, and they also spoke to their concerns: Palestine/Israel is heavily weighing on many. The concern about the Israeli Government's policies that make Israel Arabs second-class citizens, the on-going blockage of Gaza and the subsequent destabilisation of Palestinian society. As well as the concern about the anti-Islamic rhetoric using the Palestinians as a focus by many on the right, and the anti-Jewish rhetoric using the Israelis on the left.

In a moment of serendipity UPF our annual appeal this year highlights these very concerns. Proactively, we hope to raise both awareness and funds to support an organisation working at peace making/bridge building activities in the region. We also, in reaction to the overwhelming needs of the area, seek to raise awareness and funds for an organisation working in relief work in Palestine. They are: Spirit Of Peace: www.spiritofpeace.co.uk and Medical Aid for Palestinians: www.map.org.uk

The conversations started there continued throughout GA – and I hope will continue throughout this year and beyond.

The Rev John Philip Carter is a Unitarian Spiritual Director and is chair of the Unitarian Peace Fellowship.